Protesters at a Justice for Palestine demonstration carry signs on March 17, 2024 in Brussels.

(Photo: Hatim Kaghat/Belga Mag/AFP via Getty Images)

UN Expert Demands EU Suspend Trade Deal With Israel Over Gaza Genocide

"Europe is the main trading partner—which accounts I think for 30% of Israel's trade—so it has a huge power and it should use that power," said U.N. expert Francesca Albanese.

JULIA CONLEY
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Pointing out a significant "disconnect" between the European Union's political class and the public regarding Israel's assault on Gaza, the top United Nations expert on the occupied Palestinian territories on Wednesday said E.U. officials must suspend trade relations with the Israeli government.

Francesca Albanese, the U.N. special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, told *Euronews* that the E.U. has an "obligation" to suspend its association agreement with Israel because the document bars participants from committing human rights violations like those detailed in Albanese's recent report on the bombardment of Gaza.

Albanese said in her report, titled *Anatomy of a Genocide,* that she had found "reasonable grounds to believe" Israel's killing of more than 33,000 Palestinians since October—including dozens who have starved to death as a result of a near-total blockade on aid—meets the threshold for a genocide.

With Israel's European allies continuing to trade with the country, Albanese said, the right-wing Israeli government "has no incentive whatsoever to change conduct."

"Israel has the political, financial, economic means to continue operating business as usual," she said. "Europe is the main trading partner—which accounts I think for 30% of Israel's trade—so it has a huge power and it should use that power. In the end, this is not an option, it's an obligation because Article 2 of that association agreement foresees the suspension in case of violations of human rights."

Albanese's demand came nearly two months after Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and Irish politician Leo Varadkar, who resigned as prime minister this week, called on European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to conduct an "urgent review" of whether Israel is complying with its obligations under the association agreement.

Last week, Irish Social Democratic lawmaker Gary Gannon condemned the E.U. for not acting on Sánchez and Varadkar's demand.

"There hasn't actually been an official response from Ursula von der Leyen's office," said Gannon. "You mentioned that it was 'discussed' at the last Council meeting. 'Discussed'? I want more, I want documented minutes of that discussion, I want to know who was in favor and who was against. What could possibly be the justification for not enacting the humanitarian clauses within those agreements?"

Public outcry in E.U. countries over Israel's bombardment of Gaza has intensified as the war has gone on for more than six months, with 44% of French people expressing condemnation of Israel in a poll this month—up from 35% in October.

A group of German civil servants wrote to Chancellor Olaf Scholz this week demanding that Germany—which along with the U.S. provides an estimated 99% of Israel's foreign military aid—"cease arm deliveries to the Israeli government with immediate effect." The civil servants cited the International Court of Justice's interim ruling in January that Israel's assault on Gaza amounts to "plausible acts of genocide."

At *The Guardian* on Wednesday, E.U. affairs columnist Shada Islam wrote that the bloc's "collective failure to denounce Israel's unrestrained ferocity in Gaza" is "even more egregious" considering the E.U.'s outrage over human rights violations in China, Myanmar, and other countries.

Islam noted that the E.U. adopted a plan in 2020 on human rights and democracy, promising "that respect for human dignity and human rights will underpin all aspects of its policies."

Despite this, she said, "there has been no response to demands from human rights groups for a suspension of the E.U.-Israel trade agreement."

"The E.U.'s inertia makes a mockery of its action plan adopted four years ago," Islam added. "Damage to the E.U.'s reputation risks being irreparable. Even if the slaughter in Gaza is now viewed by many European citizens as an unfolding genocide, that view is not being represented by their governments."

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